DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 148 908 UD 017 320

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TITLE Building Capacity for Urban School Problem Solving Through Knowledge Utilization.
INSTITUTION Center for New Schools, Inc., Chicago, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. School Capacity for Problem Solving Group. School-Based Development Div.
PUB DATE 5 Apr 77
CONTRACT 400-75-0018
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, N.Y., April 5, 1977); For a related document see UD 017 325, UD 017 324

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Information Services; Information Utilization; *Organizational Development; *Organizational Effectiveness; *Parent Participation; *Problem Solving; Public Schools; *School Organization; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *California (Oakland)

ABSTRACT

One of the original premises of the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project (DTA) was that the ideal school organization manifests self renewal and adaptability. This conception of organization has been sharpened through the years by the Oakland, California, branch of the DTA. In this paper, the aspects of self renewal and adaptability which facilitate the problem solving capacity of urban schools are explored. Experiences of the Oakland project are described. Concepts held and activities initiated by DTA in Oakland are described as they helped these public schools to help themselves. Some of the methods employed include linkage (with relevant information and resources), and consciousness raising of parents, teachers and administrators. Attached to this document are copies of handouts that were distributed in one school. These are entitled "How to Develop an Effective School Board" and "How to Help Parents Become Tutors of Students". A questionnaire aimed at diagnosing the DTA team's effectiveness is also reproduced. (GC)

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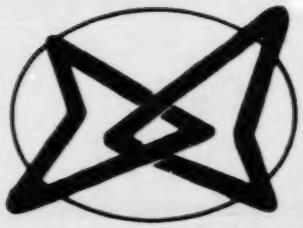

Building Capacity for Urban School Problem Solving Through Knowledge Utilization*

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UD017320

Presented as part of a symposium on DTA: A New Approach to Linking Research with Practice in Facilitating Local School Problem Solving at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York City, April 5, 1977.

This paper is part of the Documentation and Technical Assistance Project of the Center for New Schools, 59 East Van Buren Street, Chicago, Illinois and of the Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1472 Kincaid Street, Eugene, Oregon. This Project is funded by the School Capacity for Problem Solving Program of the National Institute of Education, contract #400-75-0018. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect views of that agency.

Building Capacity for Urban School Problem Solving

Through Knowledge Utilization*

by

Richard A. Schmuck

In our west coast-based research on organization development in schools, prior to this Documentation and Technical Assistance project, we conceived the ideal school organization to be featured by self renewal and adaptability. We saw organizational self renewal and adaptability as being constituted of receptivity to the environment, active use of internal resources, and responsiveness to the environment; we viewed these concepts as analogous social system counterparts to Maslow's psychological concept of self actualization.

Through our conceptual work with our colleagues in the DTA and our empirical work during the last few years in Oakland, we have sharpened and concretized the concepts of self renewal and adaptability. These key concepts are graphically arrayed on the next page. By starting on the right-hand side of the array and progressing from right to left, the reader can more easily follow the concepts presented below.

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* Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New York City, April, 1977.

Graphic Array of Key Concepts

from

Building Capacity for Urban School Problem Solving Through Knowledge Utilization

by

Richard A. Schmuck

The Typical School

as it presents itself with an undeveloped capacity for problem solving

The Planned Change Design

involving:

Data Feedback

LINKAGE
- for Consciousness Raising
- integral to Problem Solving

Process Training and Consultation

The Changing School

having:

Common Goals and Diagnoses

Rapid Information Exchange

Norms of:
- Openness
- Dispersed influence
- Emotional support

The Target School

as it presents itself with a well-developed capacity for problem solving, with:

Norms
Structures, & Procedures
for
DIAGNOSIS
RETRIEVAL
COLLABORATION

indicators of
Self renewal and Adaptability

The Capacity for Problem Solving

Three sets of institutionalized norms, structures, and procedures are indicative of self renewal and constitute the basic ingredients of an organizational capacity for problem solving: (1) first, there is the systematic diagnosis of current states of affairs and methods for establishing and sharing agreements about desirable targets; (2) second, we have the active retrieval of information and action plans, both from within and from outside the school; and (3) third, we point to mobilization of staff collaboration for generating plans and for taking initial steps to move from the current state to the new targets. Actions taken by us as external facilitators to build or enhance the school's norms, structures, and procedures in relation to diagnosis, retrieval, and collaboration constitute the distal targets of our interventions in Oakland.

Facilitating Capacity

Our experiences in Oakland lead us to believe that our actions as facilitators should commence with the teachers' and administrators' most pressing and immediate problems and build gradually toward making organizational diagnosis, retrieval, and collaboration themselves the convening tasks for problem solving and action planning. We have learned that making this transition from immediate problems to the establishment of a more fundamental capacity for problem solving is extremely difficult, requiring considerable time and energy of faculty members and the facilitators.

Moving to the left in the graphic array, we point out that our

experiences show that the administrators and teachers must share some common goals and diagnoses of the here and now, have skills of rapid information exchange, and share norms in support of interpersonal openness, dispersed influence, and emotional support. For our facilitative part, making this transition calls for a tailored design involving some internal data collection and feedback, some linkage to outside resources, and some process training and consultation.

Through questionnaires, interviews, and observations we help staffs to communicate about educational goals, to assess their current situations, and to reach agreements about current problems and interim targets to pursue. In the role of a third party, we link staff members with relevant resource people, practitioners, and outside information. By training staffs in skills of communication, problem solving, and decision making and by consulting with them as they run their task-centered meetings, we help them to build procedures to support collaboration.

While much of our current DTA technical assistance in Oakland is being informed by our previous OD work, our former consultative efforts did not sufficiently attend to the power of retrieving useful information from outside the school. Indeed, our OD theory emphasized the use of resources that already existed within the staff while deemphasizing outside resources, arguing that the proverbial pot of gold is to be found in one's own back yard. While it is true that resources within a staff often go untapped, it is also quite true that during periods of rapid change and innovation many new ideas pop up all around. There should be some way of getting those new and useful ideas from one school to another.

Knowledge Utilization Through Linkage

We view knowledge utilization as making information that is not routinely dealt with by staff members applicable to their problem solving, either by their directly employing it as an integral part of their problem solving process or by its raising awareness so that previously unrecognized issues are now brought into consciousness as problems. And, because of the nature of the DTA, we have emphasized external linkage--or helping the focal school to get in contact with relevant information, practitioners, and other resource people outside itself.

Let me briefly illustrate how linkage has functioned in our work with staff members in Oakland. First, by way of consciousness raising, we have used information from most of the DTA sites. Some inputs are delivered in the form of two to four page written descriptions. For example, in one school where involving parents with teachers to upgrade the instructional program was a primary target we offered several alternative directions through handouts entitled: (1) "How to Develop an Effective Neighborhood School Board"; and (2) "How to Help Parents Become Tutors of Students." (See attachments.) We also presented a large picture gallery showing a variety of ways parents and teachers can pull together to improve the instructional program. This was displayed in a prominent place in the school for a few weeks. We developed and used a slide show presentation at several meetings of the faculty and parent-teacher organization to depict alternative levels of parent-teacher involvement and the potential benefits and debits of each. And, most recently we have asked staff members to read and critique DTA case studies, partly to broaden their alternatives for new

action. The handouts, picture gallery, slide show and case studies were presented early in our relationship with members of the school planning team (made up of teachers and parents), with the principal, with occasional meetings of the entire staff, and in a large meeting of parents and teachers, especially designed to introduce alternative ideas about parent-teacher involvement for instructional improvement.

These consciousness raising activities were aimed at expanding the repertoire of possibilities for the school. The spirit of these offerings was--"different types of parent-teacher cooperation are possible --different activities in relation to parent-teacher cooperation actually exist in a variety of schools--what might these programs mean for us at our school, given our particular context?"

The second function of linkage in Oakland has been to make available information that would be integral to the problem-solving process itself. Here, information is sought and retrieved after the school participants have defined their targets and are searching for specific tips on how to move toward them. This second use of knowledge requires it to be specific, often more technical, than the knowledge presented for the purpose of consciousness raising. It aims to tell the school participants what they might do, how they might proceed, and how to overcome obstacles that will inevitably arise.

For example, after raising the consciousnesses of some principals and instructional assistant principals about the importance of their becoming management teams to do problem solving together in their schools, we offered a diagnostic questionnaire that was developed out of our empirical

analyses of the nine sites to help the principals and their assistants establish plans for creating viable management teams to do problem-solving on instructional issues. A questionnaire entitled, "Diagnosing Our Team's Effectiveness in Problem Solving" was produced and used to kick-off a 15 hour team-building workshop.

In the school where parent-teacher cooperation was the target, we facilitated movement toward new norms, structures, and procedures that would support parent-teacher cooperation by putting the planning team directly in touch with specific teachers and parents of other schools where parent-teacher cooperation was already functioning. Through face-to-face meetings and subsequent correspondence and telephone calls, the outsiders became useful resource people to the Oakland educators and parents.

In both instances of retrieving information for consciousness raising and for the problem solving process we of the DTA take the role of third party catalysts, helping to build the linkage and supplying process consultation so that the linkage can be effectively carried out. We have only begun to test out our functioning as linkers. We have had enough experience now, however, to value the addition of knowledge retrieval in the form of external linkage to the repertoire of consultation for organization development in schools.

HOW TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL BOARD

A Neighborhood School Board (NSB) can become more deeply active in the life of a school than a district board; it can marshall help and support from parents. An NSB usually contains about a dozen people drawn both from parents and educators. It works out solutions to problems and makes decisions about matters such as budget, curriculum, methods of instruction, evaluation of personnel, and employment and dismissal of personnel.

1. Start with any parents who are already in touch with the school, but do not elect your first board from that group alone. Do not elect a board from any existing organization--PTA or any other.

2. Gather a group of parents and teachers (and students, if possible) whose job it will be to get ready for an election. Recruit new members to this group whenever possible. Before the first election, the community must be as fully informed as possible; previously uninterested parents must be invited to participate in some way in school affairs, the principal and faculty must be prepared to share power with the Neighborhood School Board, and support must be elicited from the school district.

3. During the early stages, long before an actual election is planned, recruit parents for any manner of participation in the school they may feel comfortable with--helping with seasonal decorations and parties, helping in the library, helping with extra-curricular activities, working paid or unpaid as teachers' aides, working as paid employees in the cafeteria, working as secretaries, and so on. Invite these people to all meetings concerning the contemplated NSB.

4. Recruit a wider number of parents than are at present participating in school affairs. Hunt especially for those who want to solve problems jointly with faculty and students. The get-ready group should go door-to-door through many parts of the community to offer the opportunity for participation. Have meetings in private homes.

5. Anticipate conflicts with the school district, with community groups such as taxpayers' groups, neighborhood improvement associations, perhaps even with the city government. Build bridges early with those surrounding organizations. Carry out joint projects with those organizations if possible. At least, find occasions to give them support in their own work.

6. When holding meetings for purposes of giving information about the idea of a Neighborhood School Board, whether at school or in people's houses, select many of the leaders of the meetings to be similar in socio-economic class, political sophistication, and ethnic group to the person attending. The usual sophisticated, highly verbal "community leader" will scare away people of less sophistication and experience in public affairs.

7. When holding informational meetings, raise questions of matters that should come within the decision-making domain of the NSB, but do not try to reach agreement about them. Explore the possibilities. Discuss hiring and firing of teachers, budget allocations, curricular questions, control of students, methods of teaching, possible services to adults in the community, relations to other community organizations, or anything that anyone proposes. Discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of any proposed kind of work or decision-making domain for the NSB.

8. The principal should make known to every meeting, in person or by proxy, his/her willingness to delegate powers to the NSB. As time goes by, teachers should join meetings of parents to declare <u>their</u> willingness to share power with parents. If the principal is not willing to share power, or not many teachers, go back to stage 1, or drop the project.

9. In disseminating information about the idea of an NSB, clarify the difference between and NSB and the PTA or any other existing organization connected with the school.

10. Seize any opportunity for success. If any task arises in which parents could be helpful, mobilize a group to do so even if the NSB is not yet officially established. during the early stages of forming the NSB, a group of parents presented a request on an important matter to the district's School Board and won their case. Another group held an actual meeting at an educational convention to demonstrate their functioning.

11. Some parents will not previously have spoken at a public meeting, or semi-public, or will never have participated in a decision-making group. Use a method of conducting meetings that will encourage members to show appreciation of the contributions of the less experienced members.

12. In recruiting people to run for positions on the school board, be sure that a large proportion are <u>not</u> now outstanding leaders in the community. Encourage some to run who have never chaired a meeting of any kind.

13. Draft a constitution and by-laws for the NSB. Let this document be a recommendation to the first elected NSB, for them to ratify or alter as they see fit; do not require them to adopt it whole.

14. Hold an election. If a mailing to residents of the area is used, follow up, after the mailing had had time to reach the homes, with a door-to-door canvass. If a parent has mislaid the ballot or is confused about its meaning, offer help but not persuasion.

15. The NSB must be given important powers. The Neighborhood School Board decides upon teachers to be hired and regularly evaluates incumbent teachers.

16. Back up the decisions of the NSB, even when they meet strong opposition from the outside. Especially at the beginning, the NSB must believe it has real power, or the new enterprise will probably coliapse.
the NSB voted to close the school a half a day early on a Friday so that a Christmas party could be held for staff and the NSB. The principal had told them that the action was illegal, but they voted the closure anyway. The principal closed the school, despite the punishment he knew he would get from district officials.

17. Expect some failures. Help members of the NSB to avoid punishing one another when failure occurs. Review the strengths people have and take steps for a stronger future. People must feel they have the freedom to fail as well as the strength to succeed.

18. Hold sessions with the NSB for the sheer purpose of building cohesiveness and mutual trust. The NSB will contain some people who join the group feeling like fish out of water. Build occasions in which everyone can feel listened to an in which descriptions of emotion are legitimized. The NSB will encounter many threats and other stresses, and it will need a great deal of inner strength.

19. Some parents will be fearful of teachers, and some teachers will be fearful of parents. Provide occasions when they can admit their fears and discuss them.

20. Distrusts between ethnic groups will enter the deliberations of the NSB. Discuss them openly.

21. Hold some meetings of the NSB, especially the meetings for building group cohesiveness, away from the school or other customary setting. Some parents will not previously have gone out of town on an overnight trip. They will find the new experience exhilarating and rewarding, but initially frightening. Give them special support: help with logistics, plenty of company, friends as roomates, and so on.

22. When new members are elected to the NSB, take a session to bring them up to date. Hold a session that reviews the history of the NSB, its goals and struggles. Help the new members to feel themselves a part of a tradition.

23. Both before and after the NSB is established, maintain frequent face-to-face communication between NSB and teachers, NSB and neighborhood, NSB and students.

24. Expect that building an NSB will require large expenditures of time and effort. Cut other duties to avoid exhaustion. Expect sudden expenses. when sudden expenses such as transportation have arisen, teachers have paid for them out of their own pockets.

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HOW TO HELP PARENTS BECOME TUTORS OF STUDENTS

Parents do not need to be experts in subject-matter to be good tutors. They do need to enjoy helping children learn things. They should be able to ask simple and clear questions of the child, and they should be able to tell when the child's thinking is ready for a new leap in learning, or has come to a dead end, even when the child cannot say so.

1. Start with any small group of parents who are easy to reach. When necessary, recruit through established organizations--PTA, advisory committees, neighborhood school board, part-time aides, and so on.

2. Do not have formal sessions in which teachers teach parents how to teach. Instead, use informal sessions in which everyone shares ideas with everyone else, as in items 3 and 4 below.

3. Have meetings between the parents and the teachers in which parents can explain both the troubles and the triumphs they are encountering and in which teachers and parents can get ideas from one another not only about tutoring, but also about effective collaboration between teachers and parents.

4. Choose one or more students who are not bothered by having a group of adults looking on. Let a parent tutor the student in some small lesson. Then let the group discuss how the tutoring went and the alternate ideas they would have for conducting it. The purpose in such a practice-and-discussion session is not to decide how to do it "right," but to generate a number of alternative methods from which each parent can choose a method that will suite that parent best, and to understand how different methods are best suited to different students.

5. The parents and teacher who work together in the program must trust and respect one another. Sound them out. If there is distrust or lack of respect, hold meetings in which worries can be expressed and worked out.

6. When the first group of parents has developed confidence in tutoring, ask them to help recruit other parents. Small meetings in homes are best for parent-to-parent recruiting. Continue, however, to ask existing organizations to publicize the need for tutors.

7. When some students have benefitted from the tutoring--when the students believe they have benefitted--make occasions in classrooms or in less formal gatherings when those students can tell others about their successes.

8. When new parents volunteer, have meetings in which the new parents can discuss tutoring with those who have become confident of their skill.

9. Hold more-or-less regular meetings of all tutors so that they can talk about how the tutoring is going and feel the support of the group.

10. Anticipate some anxiety or conflict within the school about the parental tutoring program. Explain the purpose and ground rules of the program to the faculty, and explain it more than once. Make it clear that teachers are not going to be required to exert extra effort because of the parent tutoring program.

11. Publicize the parental tutoring program in the community. Make it clear that the parents are not be substitutes for regular teachers, but are enriching and broadening their work. Say something, too, about the benefits for parents and families.

12. Find occasions in meetings to express appreciation to the parent-tutors. Let the tutors and other parents know that you are grateful for their work. Let teachers know, too.

13. Research done so far on tutoring by adults (non-teachers) seems to indicate that it goes best if the teaching materials are written in concise, small steps, with clear directions about what to do, both for tutor and student. Researchers use the name "programmed tutoring" for tutoring that uses that kind of written, detailed help. We have copied below an excerpt from a research report about programmed tutoring. Find teaching materials of the programmed sort if you can. If you cannot, you may wish to take time for teachers and parents to write some, collaboratively.

14. If tutoring by parents goes well, you might like to try "peer tutoring" --in which students tutor other students.

An Excerpt from a Research Report

"Data obtained from 17 school systems in 10 states demonstrated that programmed tutoring was an effective teaching method, regardless of whether tutors were mature women with high school education or underachieving high school students.... Moreover, several different tutorial programs have been used in the various studies, indicating that the tutorial technique and not the material was responsible for the successful results. An interesting finding in the nationwide evaluation was that large systems were more likely to obtain statistically significant results. The authors offer a plausible explanation by suggesting that programmed tutoring is most effective with children having the greatest difficulty in learning to read--and such children tend to be concentrated in the larger school systems."

--pp. 358-359 of Linda Devin-Sheedhan, Robert S. Feldman, and Vernon L. Allen. Research on children tutoring children: A critical review. Review of Educational Research, 1976, 46(3), 355-385.

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DTA

Documentation and Technical Assistance
in Urban Schools

Diagnosing Our Team's Effectiveness in Problem-Solving

Problem solving is a continuing part of the work of any team. The more skillfully a team can deal with its problem, the small as well as large ones, the more smoothly all the work of the team will go, the better the interpersonal relationships will be and the higher the individual member's satisfaction will be.

A problem can be defined as the difference between the way things are and the way ideally they might be. The ideals of a team are often called its goals. Thus, problem solving is taking positive action to move toward the team's goals. Thus, for problem solving to take place in a team, there must be some agreement on goals, some understanding of the current state of affairs, and some skill in generating action proposals for moving from the current state toward the goals.

On the scales below you are asked to show how often certain aspects of problem solving occur in your team. To answer each question, describe the way you think things are now and indicate how you would prefer them to be. For each question, circle only one word under I believe this happens and circle only one word under I Prefer this to happen.

1. We discuss our own goals and the description of our goals is specific and clearly understood by every team member.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

2. We have ways of knowing when we are moving toward our goals and when our actions are taking us in some other direction.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

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3. We compare our movement toward our goals with earlier plans and try to make adjustments when we need to.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

4. We engage in problem solving for changing our methods of moving toward goals when things are not going well.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

5. We keep in touch with each other's ideas and skills so as not to miss available alternatives for action.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

6. We have effective ways of setting new action steps in motion toward our goals. Plans are not so rigid that change in plans become impossible or painful.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

7. We "keep up" with our environment by listening to a wide range of views and maintaining varied sources of information.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

8. We discuss how we and others view our team and its performance and find ways to deal with conflicting inputs when they occur.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

9. We maintain flexible expectations about one another and attitudes that encourage risk taking. We are aware of the diversity in our team and can develop it when needed.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less

10. Everyone pitches in collaboratively when there is work to be done; our team doesn't just "look" productive because some of us work diligently and bear the burdens of the non-productive, low-effort rest of us.

I believe this happens	I prefer this to happen
usually	more
occasionally	the same
rarely	less